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SUBJECT: 2008 Sydney Biennale Report and Refining Future Support

REF: A) 08 STATE 42434; B) 08 CANBERRA 00460

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1.(SBU) Summary: Post recently received the final report from the organizers of the 2008 Biennale of Sydney: Revolutions - Forms That Turn, held June 18 through September 7, 2008. The report gave credit to ECA support (reftel A) with a small logo on the last page of the report, alongside logos for other consulates and embassies. As detailed in reftel B, post was concerned by the lack of substantive consultation prior to major financial support for American artists' participation in the 2008 Biennale, and by some works with politically partisan messages which countered MSP goals. Post recommends that future USG support focus on engaging local Australian artists or curators, and that the Biennale pursue funding for American artists' participation in future Sydney biennales from foundations and the private sector. The ECA funding provided for the 2008 Sydney Biennale would have advanced post's MSP goals more effectively had it been available for multiple modest grants for cultural programs designed by post. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The overall budget for the Sydney Biennale was around U.S \$6.5 million. Post received \$110,000 from ECA/PE/C/CU to underwrite costs associated with the U.S. representation at the 2008 Sydney Biennale. That included: \$80,000 for exhibition support, travel of U.S. artists, installation of artworks, and other associated costs described in the proposal budget provided by the Sydney Biennale directly to ECA; \$20,000 for public programs organized by the Biennale of Sydney Ltd. International Festival of Contemporary Art; and \$10,000 for public programs organized by the Mission. In post's assessment, the \$10,000 for public programs was effective for engaging Australians.

¶3. (SBU) The bulk of funding went towards partially defraying costs of participation (e.g., exhibition support, travel, installation of artworks) for American artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, Kelly Barrie, Tammy Ben-Tor, Mark Boulos, Mark Dion, Sam Durant, Dan Graham, Joan Jonas, Paul Pfeiffer, Michael Rakowitz, and Lawrence Weiner, Matthew Buckingham, Yevgeniy Fiks, Gareth James, and Michael Rakowitz; and Biennale public programs with critics and journalists Jerry Saltz, Gregory Volk, Dan Graham, Garland Allen, and Emily Sundblad.

¶4. (SBU) The \$10,000 for public programs designed by post allowed regional curators from across Australia to participate in the 2008 Sydney Biennale. PAS Sydney arranged for 7 emerging curators to participate in the Sydney Biennale's closing symposium, September 6-7, 2008. PAS used the \$10,000 to provide funding for transportation, per diem and hotel accommodations for one night. This unique contribution of the Mission broadened participation to include emerging curators from outside New South Wales, reinforcing and expanding Australian appreciation for the U.S. commitment to cultural exchange. The connections forged

with the seven emerging curators should advance long-term efforts to introduce American culture in Australian galleries and museums.

15. (SBU) As a result of the post designed public program:

- we reinforced U.S. commitment to cultural exchange;
- we expanded Australian arts community appreciation for U.S. public diplomacy;
- we engaged regional audiences;
- we broadened participation in a Sydney festival by bringing in curators from beyond New South Wales;
- curators from beyond New South Wales;
- participants gained an otherwise unavailable opportunity to meet fellow curators and artists;
- and participants learned about the latest developments in curatorial practice.

16. (SBU) Post's public programs directly engaged the following regions and participants:

WESTERN AUSTRALIA - Robert Cook, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of Western Australia

NORTHERN TERRITORY - Siying Zhou, Program Manager, 24HR Art, NT Centre for Contemporary Art

QUEENSLAND - David Burnett, Curator, International Art Gallery of Modern Art, Queensland Art Gallery

VICTORIA - Simon Maidment, Director, Satellite Art Projects

VICTORIA - Brendan Lee, Artist and Freelance Curator

VICTORIA - Mark Feary, Program Coordinator, West Space

VICTORIA - Ulanda Blair, Special Projects Coordinator, Nextwave

17. (SBU) Comment: We strongly recommend for Sydney's future biennales that the USG significantly reduce its contribution. While a modest grant to the Biennale may be warranted, we do not believe the public impact of this year's grant was commensurate with the amount of money expended. We also strongly recommend that ECA continue to provide sufficient funds for us to design our own programs that take advantage of the Biennale to engage Australian cultural leaders. End Comment. CLUNE